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Software for Online Searching

By Carol Tenopir

SEARCH intermediaries now find it necessary to become experts on evaluating the many microcomputer software packages that are available to aid or enhance the online search process. Whether using a microcomputer for online searching or advising colleagues or end users about their options, searchers need to know about the different types and specific features of the software developed for the online market.

Many libraries and library schools are now sponsoring workshops to inform searchers about online software products. Bill Coons, reference librarian at Cornell University, wrote me about the Cornell library's workshop on online search software. It began with overviews of the advantages of searching with a microcomputer and what is needed to get started. Most of the workshop was devoted to outlining the features of selected software packages. Included were comparisons of 1) general communications packages (e.g., *PC-Talk III* and *Hayes Smartcomm II*); 2) database specific front-end packages (e.g., *Search Helper*); and 3) multisystem front-end packages (e.g., *Pro-Search* and *Sci-Mate*).

At the University of Hawaii Graduate School of Library Studies we have sponsored microcomputer software workshops for librarians and end users. Software packages that we have examined include: 1) general communications packages; 2) front-end packages to access a single online system (e.g., *Search Helper*, *Searchware*, and *In-Search*); and 3) front-end packages to access multiple systems (e.g., *Sci-Mate*, *Pro-Search*). Another category of software that is sometimes overlooked at these workshops is the post processor. Post-processing software allows down-

loaded records to be formatted or manipulated for future use.

A workshop provides the ideal forum for software comparison and evaluation. Talks by searchers who have experience with the software packages, chances for hands-on experimentation, and lots of time for questions enhance the learning process. The number of software packages increases so rapidly that a series of workshops provides a valuable update for searchers.

For those who can't get to workshops my March 15 column (p. 42-43) provided an overview of searching with a microcomputer and discussion of types of software available. In the October 1, 1984 column (p. 1828-29) I discussed several front-end database access packages, concentrating on *In-Search*, a *DIALOG* front-end package marketed primarily to novice end user searchers. Since then many new packages have been developed. This column will examine a package in each of three categories: 1) single-system front-end (*Searchware*); 2) a multisystem front-end (*Pro-Search*); and, 3) a post-processor (*Professional Bibliographic Systems*).

Searchware

Although the documentation never explicitly states it, *Searchware* is a single system front-end providing access to *DIALOG*. (The company has plans to add other online systems in the future. Like other single-system software, *Searchware* is marketed primarily to the novice searcher who is probably not knowledgeable about online systems or databases.

Users obtain a *DIALOG* password through the *Searchware* company when they purchase the software. All payments for online time are subsequently made to this company. (*Searchware* documentation refers throughout to accessing the "Searchware system" or "Searchware databases" with a "Searchware password" instead of

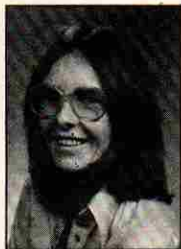
mentioning the *Searchware* role as an intermediary to *DIALOG*.) This offers the advantage of a single company for both software support and online billing, but places another level between databases and users. It is not an advantageous arrangement for intermediary searchers, but might reduce confusion for occasional end user searchers.

Searchware software is sold in over 50 subject modules, each of which is purchased separately. If you purchased the psychology subject set, for example, the *Searchware* manual would include short descriptions of each of approximately eight psychology-related *DIALOG* databases. The descriptions are essentially a restatement of the *DIALOG* bluesheets. Additionally, the *Searchware* disk would default to the psychology category of *DIALINDEX* if the user chooses to do a preliminary subject search. The first module sells for \$290, with each additional module for \$100. Each subject contains approximately 8-12 databases.

There are three levels of searching using *Searchware*. Level 1 provides fill-in screens that first correspond to the AND logic, next to the OR logic and, finally to the NOT logic. A searcher is limited to five subject terms on each logic screen and the system allows no flexibility in the way terms are grouped logically. In addition to the subject term screens, Level 1 searchers are prompted for selected nonsubject fields such as authors, language, or date.

Level 2 and Level 3 searching are essentially *DIALOG* native mode searching, with Level 2 searchers entered and stored before log on. Users must input all appropriate *DIALOG* commands, prefixes, suffixes, etc. Eleven pages of instructions in the *Searchware* manual attempt to teach the Level 2 or 3 searcher all they need to know to search.

Although *Searchware* has received positive comments in the microcomput-



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er press, it has some obvious limitations. Communications packages and automatic log on devices can be purchased less expensively. Better documentation and more responsive telephone support are offered by DIALOG directly. More satisfactory front ends are available elsewhere. The appeal of *Searchware*, however, rests with some of its limitations. The very simple Level 1 searches and narrow subject modules offer the end user easy searching for simple topics in a single subject area.

For more information contact: Searchware, 22458 Ventura Blvd., Suite E, Woodland Hills, CA 91364.

PRO-SEARCH

Many searchers are familiar with *In-Search*, Menlo Corporation's front-end package that I reviewed in October 1984. The end user market did not develop as quickly as expected, causing Menlo Corporation to reevaluate their product and their marketing efforts. Accordingly, they replaced *In-Search* with *Pro-Search*, a front-end database access package targeted for intermediary searchers.

Pro-Search is an enhanced version of the impressive but no longer available *In-Search* package. Both provide telecommunications links to DIALOG via the major communications networks. Both provide a simplified search interface that leads a user through the steps of database selection, search strategy entry, logging on, and retrieving records. The two packages share several strong features, notably: 1) database descriptions are included in the software; 2) users are led through the search process in a logical step-by-step manner; 3) screen layouts are clear with innovative use of formats and color; and, 4) there are function keys or simple menu choices for many procedures. Database descriptions in the software are useful only if they are kept up to date. A promised update service never materialized with *In-Search*, but is now available on a subscription basis for *Pro-Search*. For \$100 per year subscribers receive new database category disks every two months along with any software updates or revisions to the manual.

Pro-Search looks and works basically the same as *In-Search* with some enhancements aimed at the intermediary. The most important enhancement is the ability to access DIALOG2 and BRS via the same simplified search interface. *Pro-Search* provides information on all of the databases that are available on both of these systems. In the database selection step on *Pro-Search* the user first selects a subject. Descriptions of pertinent databases are then displayed, with DIALOG and BRS databases alphabetically interspersed. The database information provides a

handy short version of the DIALOG Bluesheets and BRS Aid Pages.

At the search strategy step either DIALOG or BRS operators can be used. *Pro-Search* will translate the input to the proper language after log on. A function key activates automatic log on to either DIALOG or BRS.

Since experienced searchers often prefer to search in native search mode, *Pro-Search* allows native mode searching with automatic log on and simplified downloading. As with many general communications packages, *Pro-Search* allows a search strategy to be entered prior to log on for fast execution once the connection is made to the host system. *Pro-Search* also has stored log on protocols for other online systems. (They must be searched in native mode once log on is complete.) These systems include: BRS/BRKTHRU, BRS/Afterdark, Compuserve, Dow Jones News/Retrieval, SDC Orbit, and Knowledge Index. Log on protocols for other online services (to a total of 20) can be added.

Another *Pro-Search* feature is an accounting function. *Pro-Search* keeps track of all cost information for each search session and for all sessions conducted over a period of time. For individual search sessions a cover sheet and invoice is generated. The invoice includes information you input about the client and search topic plus a breakdown of all charges for each database searched in that session. In addition, summary reports may be printed by client name, charge code, searcher name, and online service searched.

Pro-Search is available from Menlo Corporation for \$495 plus shipping and handling. (I suggest trying out the trial disk first for \$19.95.) If a searcher is always going to search BRS and DIALOG in native mode, a good general communications package is probably all that is needed and is much less expensive. But, *Pro-Search* is an impressive package for intermediaries if they need help in searching either DIALOG2 or BRS, like the time savings provided by function keys and automatic log ons, and will use the online documentation or accounting features.

For more information contact: Menlo Corporation, 4633 Old Ironsides, Suite 400, Santa Clara, CA 95054.

Biblio-Link & PBS

Once a searcher has conducted an online search with a front-end package and downloaded records to the microcomputer disk, a post-processing software package is needed to reformat or manipulate the records. A post processor can merely be a general purpose word processing package or it can be a package developed especially for online searching. Reformatting into a

proper bibliographic format is often desirable for researchers, students, and librarians. The *Biblio-Link* and *Professional Bibliographic System* (PBS) software is designed just for that purpose.

The two packages are used together. First, *Biblio-Link* takes downloaded records and converts them into a format that is acceptable to the *Professional Bibliographic System*. The searcher provides the communications package or front end to do the searching and downloading. (*Biblio-Link* works with *Pro-Search* and other front-end packages.) It extracts only those fields commonly used in bibliographic citations from records downloaded from DIALOG, BRS, OCLC, or RLIN. (A separate *Biblio-Link* program is needed for each of these systems.) Consistent field tags needed by PBS are added to each record.

Once the records have been extracted, converted, and tagged by *Biblio-Link*, the PBS software is used to create bibliographies. An editor feature allows the user to add information, delete unwanted information, or correct typographic errors in each downloaded record. Additional complete records can also be added with the editor.

PBS accepts input for 20 different types of materials including: monographs, journal articles, reports, newspaper articles, dissertations, maps, music scores, computer programs. PBS then formats the records into one of several standard bibliographic formats. The formatted bibliography may contain all of the records in a PBS file or a subset of records which are selected by an index term search.

Users may choose from among four standard formats: ANSI, *Science* magazine, American Psychological Association, or Modern Language Association. If none of these are acceptable, the user may define his own format. This is done by creating a "punctuation file" to define the spacing, order, labels, and punctuation desired. Bibliographies can thus be created to conform to different journal formats or standards.

Biblio-Link costs \$195 for each system. (The third and fourth system program purchased cost just \$95 each.) *Professional Bibliographic System* is priced at \$395 for the IBM-PC version. You will also need a communications package or front-end.

Professional Bibliographic System is primarily a bibliography generator. It creates very nice looking standard printed bibliographies. However, PBS should not be confused with private database software for interactive searching on a microcomputer. Private database packages such as *Sci-Mate*, *INMAGIC*, *SIRE*, and *BRS/SEARCH* are more suited for this purpose.

